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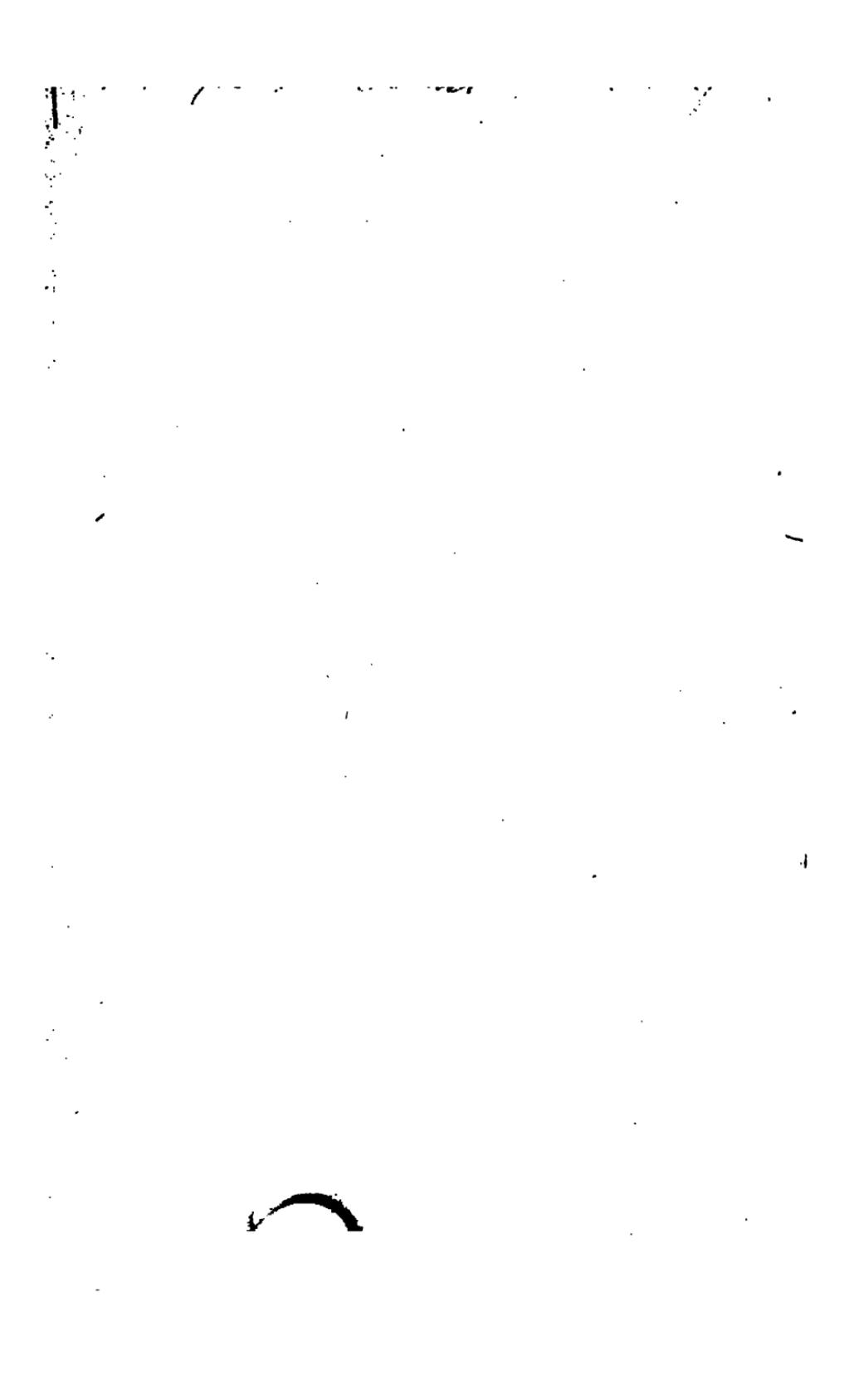
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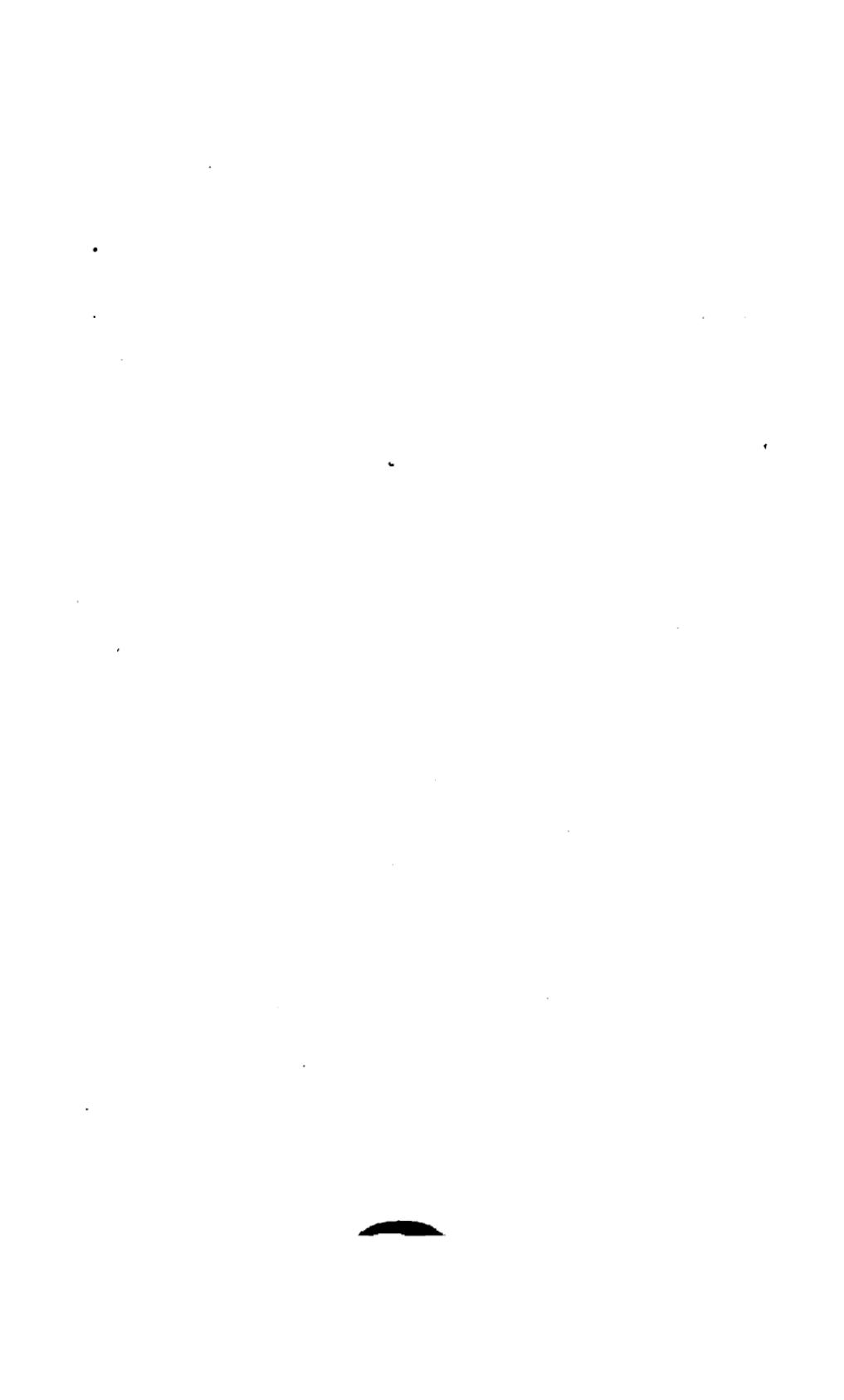
Wilhelm Soltau



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# **The Birth of Jesus Christ**

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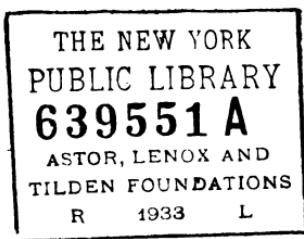
# The Birth of Jesus Christ

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## The Birth of Jesus Christ

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1. **Church and People.**—At the present day, anyone who observes the disagreement existing between the beliefs cherished amongst Church-people and the religious conceptions prevalent amongst wider sections of the people will be obliged to come to the conclusion that theologians do not allow proper consideration to be given to those objections which are raised on various points in unprejudiced quarters. For the most part, such misgivings on the part of the laity as run counter to the theological attitude for the time being in the ascendant, are looked down upon with a sort of sovereign contempt by theologians. In no branch of Science is it, to say the least, so difficult as in that devoted to Theology to secure that the sure results of scientific investigation shall be re-

cognised amongst all sections of the people alike.

The result is that the majority even of those known as 'people of culture,' that is to say, the intelligent middle-class, formed by those who have sufficient insight to see that theology is hampered by many absurd assumptions, but who hardly have time and critical discernment enough to completely examine the weak points in the system, regard the views of theologians with some measure of contempt and make light of them accordingly.

The deplorable divisions which result from this attitude and are found throughout the cultured class, splitting it asunder in a fatal manner, could be avoided—we may even say, might be removed—if only those who are engaged in theological criticism would at the proper time openly and loyally make such concessions as it is within their power to make. Little is gained by bringing against liberal theologians the charge of heresy. It is necessary that the sound results arrived at by liberal theology should win recognition and an *honourable* adjustment be effected

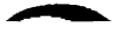
between these and the dogmas of the creed.

It was the hope of finding a reconciliation that definitely suggested the following investigations. Is it possible to believe that divisions could have arisen within the pale of Christendom on the question of the origin of Jesus, if on this point the Church parties had not maintained with remarkable tenacity certain ancient and doubtful prejudices which neither a scientific person, nor even a person well acquainted with the Gospel tradition, can regard as having been well-founded?

The following examination will suffice to show that in the case under consideration we must seek a new means of reconciling belief and knowledge, dogmatic formulæ and Evangelical truth, if theology is not to suffer the reproach of actually withholding religious truths from the people, instead of communicating them.

**2. Points in Question ; Ästhetic Aspect.**— The second article of faith, which has been considered at all times to be the fundamental tenet of true Christian belief demands, as is

well-known, that we should acknowledge the proposition that Jesus Christ, 'conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,' is by virtue of this divine origin a person equal to the Deity. And even if there are some who cannot suppress certain doubts with regard to this dogma, yet the very same persons will, as a matter of fact, seldom be able to resist the fascination exercised by the delightful legends of Jesus' childhood, which form the basis of these postulates of the creed—a fascination felt by everyone who is still able to appreciate childlike piety and a popular form of poetry. The manger of Bethlehem, notwithstanding its poor surroundings, has always been the most charming feature in the whole of the Christmas episode. The shining star, the adoring Magi, the startled shepherds, and, above all, the angel host chanting its song of praise—what is there that can be compared with this in the religious literature of any other people? And, to turn merely to the mystery surrounding the early history (Luke i. 5-80). Never has the Deity seemed to draw so close to man as He did on this occasion.



And if anyone, in spite of this feeling, after reflecting coolly and critically on the subject, might have many objections to raise to the story, he would still be obliged to admit the powerful impression made at all times by this narrative contained in the first chapter of the Gospel on the greatest masters of pictorial art. The miracles wrought by those descriptions in the minds of the artists are well-nigh greater even than the miracles in the story itself. We can quite understand the feeling, therefore, when anyone who cherishes a pious regard for this story thinks it bad taste on the part of the critic to carry his inquiries to the point of examining even the details of the record ; and we would gladly refrain from disturbing the childlike faith of those who have given themselves up in heartfelt Christmost joy to the spell of these unique legends—we would gladly refrain from this, if only the demand were not made at the same time, in all its coarseness, that the Christian who above all others wishes to claim this name shall not only be obliged to find in this story the foundation on which to build up his own

character, but also to make it the basis of the whole of his Christian faith. In this case, in addition to æsthetic motives, in addition to certain attitudes of the mind, we have to take into account considerations of a very different and most serious character.

When we have fully recognised the great value attaching to the legends of the Master's childhood as poetry, the objection is as obvious as it is fundamental that poetic beauty does not guarantee the truth of the stories as history, but much rather the contrary. And when this has been said, it requires to be emphasised, further, that a narrative, the scene of which is laid much more in Heaven than on earth, which is better informed as to the speeches of angels and their answers to questions than as to the historical events of this world, cannot lay claim to any special degree of trustworthiness. Very many good Christians have taken equal offence, and with justice, we must admit, at the 'wandering star of the wise men'—a star which astronomical research has so far been unable to discover. The murder of the infants at Bethlehem,

too, as well as the strange appearance of the Magi on the scene, would certainly not have been believed if it had not been the Evangelical recorder who related them.

But it is the *Virgin Birth of Jesus*, more than anything else, that has at all times given rise to serious doubts in the ranks of Christians who think in a scientific manner, even amongst those of strict attitude.

In former times it was usual to dismiss summarily any such doubts regarding the biblical teaching with the heavy cannon of 'the faith of the Church' or 'the authority of the biblical tradition.' The clear words of the New Testament, the account of Matthew and Luke, must, so most good Christians imagined, be sufficient to convert the most obstinate of Thomases. Thus there could, of course, soon be nothing to prevent people from paying no further regard to the matter, and looking down with a smile of pity upon those who are still naïve enough to take such fairy-tales for genuine truth. These people, however, were unbelievers, who entirely lacked the power of comprehending what 'Christian' really means.

**3. History, Profane and Sacred.** — This, then, is the way in which the state of doubt described above — a condition of things altogether intolerable — had arisen. But the course taken to escape from it is doomed, quite apart from the unsatisfactory results to which it leads, in view of the present condition of New Testament inquiry. It would, of course, be ridiculous to try to prove anything by taking a few quotations out of the Bible at our own discretion, without giving any attention to the tradition of the Bible as it is found in other passages. The times are past, when it was possible to ignore with impunity the results obtained by biblical critics.

It is true that Herr Walther, Professor of Theology at Rostok, has made a statement in his rejoinder to Harnack's *What is Christianity?* (p. 22 f.), to this effect: 'The historian, when he is asked to separate in the Gospel those portions which are valuable from those which are not, is confronted with a problem that cannot properly be solved.' But in making such an assertion he has not affected critical inquiry into the

Bible ; he is employing, rather, a destructive criticism against himself.

In the branch of inquiry with which we are dealing, nothing can be more absurd than to close our eyes to the truth that *the same historical laws must hold good*, whether we are considering profane or sacred Sources of history. Now, as is well known, the chief task of the profane historian consists in this : he is required to separate reliable accounts from those of less value, and he has to rest his results upon the former *alone*. Is the inquirer into religious truths, then, to ignore these approved principles when for this purpose, too, that of deciding the value of particular portions of the Gospels, they are found, and have been recognised, to be thoroughly firm and clear principles on which to form a judgment ?

**4. The Gospels : some Critical Results.—** The following remarks are all that need be added for the purpose of deciding the questions that confront us. The Second Gospel is the groundwork to which the First and Third Gospels owed their information regarding most of the events in Jesus' life.

Both followed at the same time a second common source, a collection of Sayings of the Lord. So, Matthew v.—vii., x., xviii., xxiii.—xxv., and Luke x.—xviii. All further records in these two Evangelists, in so far as they are not derived from these two definitely established Sources, are of eminently slighter trustworthiness, like the historical statements in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the historical statements of Paul, and of Luke in Acts,<sup>2</sup> though relatively few in number, have, of course, considerable value as Sources.

**5. Importance of Critical Results.**—Whoever allows these results attained by the modern criticism of the Bible to have due weight, will very soon recognise that the decision to which he will be led as regards the trustworthiness of the history of Jesus' childhood, will inevitably prove to be quite

<sup>1</sup> For details cp., further, the evidence given in Soltau, *Unsere Evangelien* (Leipzig, 1901).

<sup>2</sup> Acts is now presented to us, it is true, in a later redaction, to which, in particular, are to be traced most of the speeches and many of the Peter-legends. On this point, see Soltau, 'Die Herkunft der Reden in der Apostelgeschichte' in the *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1903, p. 128.

## NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF CRITICISM 11

different from the conclusion which the Church is wont to formulate in its popular teaching.

In earlier times the advocates of a scientific view of the world sought to undermine the dogmas of the Church by pointing particularly both to the miraculous element in the Gospel story, and to statements conflicting with other historical witnesses. The significance of such arguments need not be underrated, but when so much besides is still shrouded in darkness, they are not sufficient to decide the case.

In the present instance, therefore, another course must first be pursued. In the whole question at issue, this circumstance has received far too little attention—that *within the biblical tradition itself the most serious of contradictions* are to be found. The records of the childhood in Luke and in Matthew conflict with all that not only Mark, but also the other Gospels tell us, as well as with what Paul and the Acts of the Apostles hand down to us; what is more, even the narratives in the First and Third Gospels contain within them contradictions which

cannot be reconciled. When we find that this is the case, that such obscurities and contradictions exist, it is both permitted, and is even a requirement made by the scientific demand for truth, that we should clear them up.

**6. Importance of Present Inquiry.**—Indeed, as the question concerns an important part of the second article in the Creed, we have the less reason to put it on one side.

‘I believe in Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.’ So we read in the Confession of Faith, regarding the person of Christ. If it is claimed that these statements should have abiding force, it is necessary to show that they have a foundation in the Gospels. If such support be wanting, or if it should actually appear, as the certain result of weighing the Gospel accounts in the scale, that the teaching of the Bible is found to be in entire contradiction with the words contained in the Creed, then both theological science and the Creed of the Evangelical Church would require as regards

this doctrine to strike out different paths from those which it has hitherto followed.

**7. Light from Other Sources.**—From what has been said it will be sufficiently clear why it is desirable that a new examination of the story of Jesus' childhood should be undertaken. But there are other important reasons for this course, and they are reasons of a scientific character. Important discoveries of inscriptions dating from the time of Augustus have revealed to us that one of the most remarkable portions of the story of Jesus' birth is framed in the words used in inscriptions from Asia Minor with the purpose of announcing the salvation brought to the world by the birth of Augustus. This discovery, not only on account of the correspondence in wording, but also because several other features in the account of the origin of Augustus are closely related to the statements contained in the sacred legends, must lead us to the true source of the latter. In addition to this, the researches undertaken in the domain of comparative mythology have also, as regards the matter in question, led to results which

may throw a flood of light upon certain other ideas in the biblical narrative.

With such help it will now be possible with some success to separate the *original* and *genuine* features in the old tradition from later mythical elements. This is the aim which we have set before ourselves in the following examination.

**8. Birthplace and Family of Jesus.**—Any-one who wishes to answer the questions, Where was Jesus born? Who were his parents? To what family did he belong? What was taught amongst his disciples, and amongst the generation that lived after his death, as to his higher origin? is usually accustomed in the first place to adhere closely to the story handed down to us in the first chapters of the First and of the Third Gospel. And certainly without good reason.

It is true that these are the only two Gospels which furnish us with a detailed history of Jesus' childhood. This circumstance, however, should not induce us to leave out of account the other references to the subject found in Mark and Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Fourth

Gospel, especially when (without excluding perhaps even the last-named) these go back to *older Sources* than are those upon which the story of the childhood in the First and the Third Evangelists is based.

Before, therefore, we look more closely at these narratives in Matthew i.-ii. and Luke i.-ii., it is absolutely necessary that we should make a careful examination of everything that was believed and written down in other quarters as well in the Apostolic age (30-70 A.D.) regarding the origin of Jesus.

(a.) *According to Mark.*—The oldest Gospel is that of Mark.<sup>1</sup> Mark was for a time the companion of Barnabas and Paul, but wrote down his records from the lectures of Peter which, acting as his interpreter, he translated into Greek.

Mark does not now contain any traces to show that Jesus was derived from any other place but Nazareth in Galilee. His statements, whether taken together or separately, exclude the idea of a supernatural origin.

<sup>1</sup> Apart from Mark xvi. 9-20 (a later addition by Aristion), its composition is to be placed at 70 A.D. ; cp. Soltau, *Unsere Evangelien*, p. 83 f.

Mark vi. 1 ff. tells us that when Jesus came into his native town, Nazareth, the people marvelled at his teaching and works, and said : ' Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon ? and are not his sisters here with us ? ' And Jesus spoke to them in such a way as to corroborate these suggestions : ' A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.' How could Mark have written in this way, have been able to preserve this record, without objection being raised, if Jesus was generally believed to have arisen out of Bethlehem and to have been a son of the Holy Spirit ? It is precisely this latter idea that is so completely excluded by the earlier information supplied in Mark iii. When the attention of Jesus was called to the presence of his mother and his brethren, who were familiar figures in Capernaum, they were not repudiated by him on account of doubtful relationship, but because ' whosoever shall do the will of God ' is ' his brother, and sister, and mother ' (iii. 35). Had he been of supernatural origin, the people who were

unable to explain his wonderful work as a prophet, would certainly not have uttered the harsh words contained in Mark iii. 21 ('he is beside himself').<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, it is already, even on the evidence of Mark, a popular view—at first expressed, it is true, only by the demoniacs and those who had been healed<sup>2</sup>—that Jesus, the Messiah, was born in the male line of the *family of David*: a view which Jesus himself either did not share, or at least set on one side as being unimportant (cp. Mark xii. 35 f.).

(b.) *According to Acts.* The statements in the Acts of the Apostles are entirely in accord with these views of Mark. The Acts of the Apostles was not indeed in *its present form* (for example, especially in the portions containing the speeches) completed until the beginning of the second century. It is based, however, both in the journey-record and in the first chapters, upon an older work,<sup>3</sup> at any rate upon older written Sources. The fundamental views which it presents to us

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Holtzmann, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, i. 409 f.

<sup>2</sup> Holtzmann, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, p. 368 f.; Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis*, p. 33 f.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gercke in *Hermetes*, xxix. 373.

frequently therefore suggest a consciousness on the part of the community, which is still unschooled in theology, and 'may, if the theory of direct information regarding the beliefs of the early community fails, in some measure make amends to us.'<sup>1</sup>

Several passages in the *Acts of the Apostles* (iii. 6, iv. 10, vi. 14, x. 38, xxii. 8, xxvi. 9), also, now mention *Nazareth* as the place in which Jesus was born. There is never even a mere reference to Bethlehem. *Acts* ii. 30, xiii. 23 indicate that Jesus' family traced back in the male line to David; and in x. 37 f. the idea of generation by the Holy Spirit is rejected. Christ's preaching about the peace of God began in 'Galilee.' 'Jesus of *Nazareth*,' with whom 'God was,' whom 'God *anointed* with the Holy Spirit' (cp. iv. 27), who was not therefore 'a son of the Holy Spirit,' preached salvation and arose as a great prophet (iii. 22). It was only through the ideas of the resurrection and redemption that Jesus became Lord of his faithful followers.

(c.) *According to John*.—It is, further, very

<sup>1</sup> Holtzmann, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, i. 374.

noteworthy that the older portions of the Fourth Gospel,<sup>1</sup> which itself, we may be sure, was not composed until the first quarter of the second century, represented similar views.

Jesus, we are told in John vi. 42, was said to be a son of Joseph; he has his brothers on earth (John vii. 5); he was a native of Galilee (vii. 41). Indeed, throughout the Johannine writing there prevails what might be described as a polemical attitude towards those who will only believe in Jesus on condition that he is a son of David and a native of Bethlehem.

This, of course, precludes us from supposing that in the Fourth Gospel there is, apart from the earthly descent, the assumption of a higher derivation from the divine Logos. On the contrary, the truly spiritual explanation of the relationship of the Son to the Father seemed to the Fourth Evangelist to be incompatible with a sensual conception of this relationship, that is to say, with the idea that the Holy Spirit was his father.

<sup>1</sup> Soltau, *Unsere Evangelien*, p. 103 f. and *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Theologie*, ii. (1901), p. 140 f.

The Revelation of John, also (v. 5, xxii. 16),<sup>1</sup> represents Jesus to have been born as a man of the tribe of David.

(d.) *According to Paul.*—And to turn now to Paul, who did not indeed know Jesus personally, but lived in constant touch with Jesus' band of disciples. What does he tell us as to the origin of Jesus? Paul who, above all others, contributed to lift the personality of the risen and exalted Christ into a heavenly sphere—Paul draws the sharpest possible line of distinction between this *heavenly* 'Lord' of Christendom and the *man* Jesus Christ. So, especially, in the prologue of the Epistle to the Romans (i. 3). Here he declares that he wishes to preach of Jesus Christ, 'who was born of the *seed of David according to the flesh* and was powerfully declared to be a son of God *according to the Spirit* which sanctifies, *since the time that* he arose from the dead, *namely Jesus Christ our Lord.*' And the point of view is

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that these passages belong to the old Christian apocalypse (cp. Soltau, *Unsere Evangelien*, p. 125), and are not part of the Jewish apocalypses, into which at a later date a number of Christian notes were interpolated.

again precisely similar in Romans ix. 5, in which 'the fathers' of Israel are spoken of 'from whom comes Christ according to the flesh,' whereas the divine exaltation of Jesus is really the fundamental theme in Paul's preaching.

There cannot, therefore, on the evidence of such expressions, be the least doubt that Paul, high as he always placed his Lord in Heaven, represents that Jesus was begotten in the male line by Joseph, and was descended from the family of David; and if at the same time he never actually indicates that Nazareth was the birthplace of Jesus, yet, seeing that he was the companion of Mark, the Galilean home of Jesus can hardly have been unknown to him. But, to judge by the whole doctrine at which the Apostle Paul arrived concerning God and his relationship to Christ, we are at any rate safe in saying as much as this: he cannot have so lowered, so debased, his high and pure monotheism as to have regarded Christ 'also according to the flesh' as a son of the divine Spirit. The words 'born of a woman and made subject under the law'

(Galatians iv. 4) are intended to emphasise specially his human qualities and are not at all in favour of the idea of a Virgin Birth.

(e.) *Isolated passages in Matthew and Luke.*—Moreover, even isolated passages in the First and Third Gospels share the same view, in spite of the fact that the 'special history' of the childhood in both had already postulated a higher origin for Jesus. Matthew xiii. 55-56 tells us exactly the same story as Mark vi. 1 f., mentioning not only the mother and brothers and sisters of Jesus in Nazareth, but also saying expressly and with emphasis, 'a prophet is nowhere of so little account *as in his fatherland and in his own house.*' Matthew, however, makes the people say of Jesus himself, 'Is not this *the carpenter's son?*'

9. **The Genealogies.**—But it is especially noteworthy that the genealogies supplied by Matthew (i. 1-18) and Luke (iii. 23-38) only bear a proper meaning if Joseph was quite commonly regarded as the bodily father of Jesus. The fact is so simple and obvious that it requires no further argument to prove it.

The wording of the two Gospels (Matthew i. 16 and Luke iii. 23), indeed, as we now have them, has sought to hide a little the serious discrepancies which the stories of the Virgin Birth of Jesus and of the fatherhood of Joseph were found to contain. In Luke iii. 23 the words were added, 'Jesus *was held*<sup>1</sup> to be a son of Joseph'; in Matthew i. 16 we find the words, at least in most copies, 'Joseph, *the husband of Mary, of whom* was born Jesus, who is called Christ.' But there are other divergent texts. An old Syriac text, for example, gives in Matthew i. 16, 'Joseph, to whom was betrothed the Virgin Mary, begat Jesus Christ.' The addition in Luke iii. 23 can only show the perplexity of the writer; it cannot weaken the fact that the older Evangelic record, in giving the genealogy, also started from the idea of the paternity of Joseph.

From this it is manifest, to say the least,

<sup>1</sup> ὡς ἐνομίζετο. Cp. now, in addition, Schmiedel, *Protest. Monatshefte*, 6th year, 3rd part, p. 85. [Cp. also the same author's article 'Mary' in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 2952 ff.]

that the older and more original versions of the First and the Third Gospel, as regards the most important point in the history of the childhood, have not begun to diverge from the accounts *of all the other authorities of the Apostolic Age.*

**10. Influence of Old Testament on Development of Story.**—Jesus of Nazareth, legitimate son of Joseph the carpenter and of Mary, native of Galilee, but generally supposed to be a descendant of David, was he whom a wonderful and higher power chose to be the Messiah of his people, the Saviour of the whole world. This is the concurrent testimony borne by all the statements of the Apostolic Age ; this is the *true Evangelical teaching.*

It is only the legends of the childhood, added to the First and Third Gospel in the first to second generations after the destruction of Jerusalem, that have given a different account of the matter ; and these also, *in the first instance*, merely added in a very guarded manner certain Jewish - Christian features, without completely transforming them. The starting-point from which all

further legend developed was the saying of the prophet Micah (v. 1) quoted in Matthew ii. 6 : 'And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah art not one of the least among the princes of Judah ; for out of thee shall come a governor who is to be a ruler over my people Israel.'

Any intelligent person can see to what a slight extent any reliable support is here given to statements concerning the birth-place of Jesus. But it is equally evident that *if once* the derivation of Jesus from David's family, from the stem of Jesse, was taken for granted, the real place in which Jesus was born *might* also be sought in David's town.

In fact, it was in this way that the first important step was taken beyond the assumptions which had so far prevailed. Christians holding the popular belief had not been able to rid their minds of the reflections that led so naturally to this combination of ideas: Jesus, being the Messiah, must have sprung from the tribe of David ; consequently, *also from the town of David*. Towards the end of the first century, Bethlehem was regarded as the

real birthplace of Jesus. Upon this foundation were built up the two narratives which now stand at the beginning of the First and the Third Gospel.

11. **Details in the 'Special History.'**—Let us look at the details—which frequently differ from one another—in these narratives. The oldest portion of this special history of Jesus' childhood is given to us in Luke ii. 1-7. It starts, as has been said, with the idea, as the foundation-stone of the whole fabric, that, if Jesus was the Messiah of the tribe of David, Bethlehem must have been his real home. The conclusion was drawn from the saying of the prophet Micah (v. 1), mentioned above.

(a.) *The Census.*—Of course the older popular tradition did not seek any artificial means of explaining how it was that Jesus' parents had come from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was the literary expert, Luke, who first imagined that he had found out the reason; it was this: Jesus' parents removed from Nazareth to Bethlehem (Luke ii. 1), on the occasion of the *census* arranged in Syria in 6 A.D. by Quirinius. He is not, however, to be congratulated on the success of

his explanation. The great chronological difficulties in which the history of the life of Jesus is involved by these statements in Luke are well known. Herod the Great under whom Jesus is supposed to have been born was already dead (4 B.C.).

But too little attention has been given to another fact. The story is seen from internal evidence to be extremely improbable. Imagine the insufferable state of confusion that must have arisen if every family had travelled back to the native place of its ancestors in order to be taxed! How was this possible, even if we only take account of the majority of people?

(b.) *Presentation in the Temple*.—Luke ii. 21-40 then brings the popular history of the birth to an end. The parents of Jesus presented their son in the temple of Jerusalem. Here they brought the prescribed offerings, and heard the prophetic words of Simeon and of Anna. Then they journeyed back to Nazareth, their native place.

In the whole of this narrative we again see reflected, in an unadulterated form, the old Jewish-Christian legend. The words of

Simeon recall the beautiful words addressed by Israel in days of old to Joseph when, after being lost, he had been found (Genesis xlvi. 30). The terms he uses further have reference to Isaiah xlvi. 6 and xlix. 6. Luke ii. 35 also reminds us of Isaiah viii. 14.

**12. Elaboration of the Story.** — It is particularly to be noted that in this version of the history of the childhood<sup>1</sup> *Joseph* still appears always as the father of Jesus. So in verses 16, 27, 33, 41, 43, 48. If what is related of Mary in Luke i. had been known to the author of verses 49 and 50, they could not have been written in the form in which we have them. There can, therefore, be no doubt that, corresponding to the history of the childhood in Luke ii. 1 f., an old story was current in Palestinian circles which represented that Jesus actually came from Nazareth, but was born as a descendant of David in Bethlehem, and was really derived in the male line from David himself; though the

<sup>1</sup> Including even Luke ii. 8-21. The concluding words in ii. 21 were of course added, by way of explanation, by the same person who interpolated Luke i. 26-56. The same fundamental view prevails also in Matthew ii. 1 f., as well as in Lk. ii. 1 f.

story even in this developed form knew nothing as yet of the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It described in a genuinely Jewish way the joy manifested by the oldest generation when the Messiah appeared, and was only legendary in so far as it acquiesced in the dogmatic views which required that the Messiah should be born only in David's native place.

It is remarkable that the scene of the rest of the story of the childhood, as given in Luke, is laid more in Heaven than on earth. Angels and prophesyings play the chief parts in it. Its origin is, as we propose to show immediately, obviously of quite a different kind from that of the simple description mentioned above (Luke ii. 1-7, 21-52).

**13. Further Additions.** — Let us first mention at this point a few other additions to the story of the birth in Matthew. These, if they do not point as well to the same origin as those in Luke, are nevertheless also based upon a Palestinian version of the story of the childhood.

Luke had preserved the idea that Nazareth was the native place of Jesus' parents. He had made Jesus' birth take place simply

during a temporary stay made by his parents in Bethlehem. We learn from Matthew, on the other hand, that Bethlehem was the real native place of Joseph and Mary. Accordingly, Matthew was confronted with the task of showing, *not* how it was that Joseph came *to* Bethlehem, but, on the contrary, how it was that Joseph with his family had come at a later date *from* Bethlehem *to* Nazareth. The popular tradition followed by the First Evangelist had much to say on this point; there were in the first place stories of every kind which, also, had grown up on Jewish-Christian ground. According to these, all the blame attached to Herod. His cruelty, his violent persecutions, fixed themselves firmly in the memory of the people. This Herod, this earthly ruler over the people of God, must have attempted to take the life of even the Anointed One of God. This explains the assumption of a flight into Egypt; it was for the purpose of escaping the murder. This explains also the massacre of the children at Bethlehem. And, lastly, this explains the return of Joseph, not to Bethlehem, but to



Nazareth ; it was in order not to fall into the hands of the tyrant Archelaus, who now reigned owing to the death of Herod.

What Josephus tells us (*Ant.* xvii. 2. 4) is in favour of the *relative historicity* of the statement that Herod, tyrannically disposed as he was, felt very anxious lest a national ruler might rise up against him. Apart from this, the statements about the flight into Egypt and the massacre of the children at Bethlehem—and of course no reasonable person regards them as historical, the premises which led to their invention having as a matter of fact been discovered—coincide with Old Testament narratives. The massacre of the children at Bethlehem not only has its prototype in the story in Exodus i. 15 f., but also in a special sense in the developed form of the fable as preserved to us in Josephus (*Ant.* ii. 9. 2).<sup>1</sup> From this it would appear that Pharaoh gave command to kill the children, when a scribe had announced to him the birth of a boy who would one day become dangerous to him. In this case, then, if we leave out of the question altogether the Old

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Holtzmann, *Hand-Kommentar*, 4th ed. p. 193.

Testament quotations,<sup>1</sup> dragged in for the sake of attestation, we may be sure that the idea we have suggested as being sufficient to explain why Joseph had been compelled to take flight from Bethlehem, must already have been present in the old Jewish-Christian tradition.

It is noteworthy that even in the developed form of the history of the childhood in Matthew, there is nothing to indicate that Joseph was *not* the father of Jesus. The point of the whole narrative—and the only point—is that Joseph of the tribe of David was the father of Jesus. Otherwise, it has no meaning.

There was, therefore, a *further-developed Jewish-Christian* version of the story, to the effect that Jesus, the son of Joseph, of the tribe of David, was born in *Bethlehem*, and from that place journeyed to Nazareth—a story recounted in a different form and with different ideas from those of the account in the First and the Third Evangelists.

<sup>1</sup> On these so-called reflex-quotations (*Reflexionscitate*), cp. below, p. 50.

**14. Final Development.** — Then, thirdly, this Jewish-Christian tradition was entirely altered in Luke through the addition of two new elements of a quite different kind. Luke gives, that is to say, apart from the story of John's childhood,<sup>1</sup> the following details :

1. The generation of Jesus through the Holy Spirit (i. 26-56).
2. The Angels' song of praise (ii. 8-20).

And Matthew, if he knows nothing either of the story of the childhood of John, or of the second idea, has in his history of the childhood connected the first idea with Jesus in a quite special way (Matthew i. 18-25), and has, in addition, admitted into the Gospel,

3. A story of a journey made by Magi from the East, which is otherwise unknown.

<sup>1</sup> The story of the childhood of John was, as has long been well known (cp., amongst others, Holtzmann, *New-testamentliche Theologie*, i. 412), a combination of purely Old Testament elements.

Cp., amongst other passages, for Luke i. 7, Genesis xviii. 11; for Luke i. 12, Genesis xvi. 11, 17, 19; for Luke i. 15-19, Judges xiii. 4, 7, 14, etc., and xiii. 6.

As far as any further consideration is concerned, this portion of the history of the childhood may for the present purpose be put on one side

Where are we to seek for the origin of these remarkable additions to the history of the childhood of Jesus?

**15. Heathen Analogies.**—It deserves to be specially noted that these three ideas, by means of which the history of the childhood of Jesus was in the end so embellished, have *prototypes in heathen narratives*,<sup>1</sup> that indeed they may be of purely *heathen origin*.

(a.) *The Song of Praise.*—This is quite evident, especially in the *Angels' song of praise* (Luke ii. 8 f.). No Jewish-Christian would really have understood the idea that the birth of the Messiah heralded the dawn of a reign of peace *for the whole world* and of happiness for all mankind. Now, recent discoveries of inscriptions in Asia Minor have shown us the originals to which these ideas go back. In many towns of Asia Minor, as in Priene and Halicarnassus, edicts have been found (preserved in inscriptions) in which orders are given as to the celebration of the

<sup>1</sup> This, of course, excludes the idea that the form which they have taken was due to Jewish-Christians; we may be sure that they are not of Palestinian origin.

birthday of Augustus.<sup>1</sup> These edicts date from the years 2 B.C. to 14 A.D. In them Augustus is glorified as saviour (*σωτήρ*) of the whole human race, as one in whom Providence (*πρόνοια*) has not only fulfilled, but even surpassed the wish of all men. 'For,' we read in one of them, '*peace* prevails *upon earth*, harmony and order reign. Men are filled with the best hopes for the future, with joyful courage for the present.' We see here that the rejoicings at the birth of Augustus found expression in the same way as, we are told in Luke ii. 10 f., the joy at Jesus' birth did. This and similar descriptions of the happiness of the world after the appearance of Augustus cannot, therefore, have been unknown to the Evangelist when he wrote the words found in Luke ii. 8-20. The writer transferred them to the times when *his* Saviour was born; for no one who decides the question from a scientific standpoint could really doubt the priority of the Asiatic inscriptions to the first beginnings of a history of the childhood of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Every-

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the proof-passages given in Appendix, pp. 67 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Only a 'scholar' like Edmund Hoppe, (*Natur und*

one who compares the originals will feel the agreement to be really surprising. Even the word 'gospel' and the name 'saviour' occur in the inscriptions in honour of that Augustus who had at length bestowed upon the world once more the blessings of 'peace upon earth, and among men good pleasure'—blessings longed for so ardently. And the words were, as a matter of fact, no mere expression of flattery; they reveal the true sentiments of men after the terrible struggles of the civil wars.

(b.) *Adoration of the Magi*.—In a second idea, too, the adoration of the Magi, we can easily perceive the heathen origin. The point has been sufficiently elucidated by A. Dieterich in his excellent inquiry.<sup>1</sup> Dieterich correctly works out the idea that the story of the Magi is only superficially connected with the account of Herod. The only way in which it is connected with it is this: Herod requested the Magi to make inquiries

*Offenbarung*, p. 100), will maintain, as against this, the Divine Revelation of the Bible!

<sup>1</sup> *Die Weisen des Morgenlandes*, (Giessen, J. Ricker, 1901).

regarding the new-born-king of the Jews; and this, if he knew that he was born in Bethlehem, he did not really require to do at all.

In the story of the Magi we have to keep three ideas separate. They are :—

1. The star which shone in front of them.
2. The journey of the Magi to the West, and their return by another route.
3. The adoration of the new king and the presentation of gifts to him.

Of these three portions of the story, the idea of the presentation of gifts might perhaps be traced back to Old Testament prototypes. Isaiah lx. 6, amongst other passages, was in the mind of the Evangelist. But, apart from this, there can be no doubt that none of the other details grew up upon Jewish soil, but are all *based upon heathen mythology*. As regards the star of the wise men, the star of Jacob in Leviticus xxiv. 17 was, it is true, pointed to in earlier times; but this was certainly incorrect. For in the passage referred to it is a man that is intended, not a phenomenon in the sky. On

the other hand, the mythological idea<sup>1</sup> of connecting the coming of great men with the appearance of a shining star was widespread in the heathen world.<sup>2</sup>

Shining phenomena in the sky were supposed to have been seen, at the time of their birth, in the case of Alexander the Great, of Mithridates, of Cæsar, and of Augustus. It would seem to be particularly worthy of note that, as Suetonius tells us (*Augustus*, 94), in explanation of the wonderful signs observed at the time of the birth of Augustus, the interpreters of signs are supposed to have declared that they announced the birth of the *Lord of the world*. Accordingly, the idea of referring this account, also, to the *true. Lord and Saviour of the world* naturally occurred to the Church writer. The sign in the sky at once suggested the idea of introducing into the narrative the interpreters of signs, the Magi. It did not, however, at the same time suggest the Magi's change of

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the proof-passages in the Appendix, p. 80 ff.  
Cp. also Pliny, *H.N.* ii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Dieterich says appropriately on p. 8: 'The idea of a star accompanying the divine epiphany is foreign to the ideas in the sacred books of Israel.'

residence and their act of adoration. These had a quite different and peculiar origin. There is a remarkable parallel to the story of the Magi, also, in the history of the Roman Empire. The parallel has so far been neglected only because people had been accustomed to move back the date of the composition of the First Gospel to a rather early period. But after this view had proved to be erroneous,<sup>1</sup> and it appeared that the history of the childhood, in particular, as contained in the First Gospel, must be estimated to be one of the latest portions of this Gospel, there was nothing to prevent people from supposing that it was the journey of the Parthian king Tiridates and his Magians from the East in the time of Nero (66 A.D.) which gave the first occasion for adding the new incident to the story of the birth of Jesus.

Not that the historical incident was taken over consciously into the biblical narrative—we must not think of the matter in this way. But just as in the joyful Christmas message

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Soltau, *Eine Lücke der synoptischen Forschung*, pp. 11 f., 31 f.

(Luke ii. 14) the terms in which in those days it was usual to pay homage to the earthly prince of peace, Augustus, were applied quite spontaneously to the heavenly Prince of Peace, so the First Evangelist felt that the journey of the Magi from the East, which threw the whole cultured world into a state of astonishment, could only be explained if their act of adoration might be transferred from the Antichrist Nero to the Messiah.

The historical event, then, upon which the story is founded, was as follows:—In the year 66 A.D., the Parthian king Tiridates, having journeyed with a great following through the towns of Asia Minor to the West, then offered homage to Nero in Rome. Here he worshipped Nero as his god, as the Sun-god Mithras, and then returned by another route through the cities of Asia. It is true that the later Greek reporter, Dio (about 220), describes the act of adoration in the Roman forum in the most precise terms, without speaking expressly of the Magi; but Pliny, the contemporary of Nero, in his *Natural History* (*Historia*

*naturalis*, xxx. 6) tells us particularly of the Magi and of the priestly character of the journey (cp. p. 72 f.).<sup>1</sup>

(c.) *The Virgin Birth*.—Thus two of the heathen ideas to which expression is given in the history of the childhood of Jesus Christ have been derived from accounts of the honours and acts of homage paid to the Roman emperor. May we not suppose that the third also, the idea of the *Virgin Birth of Jesus*, had a similar origin?<sup>2</sup>

We may view the story of the Virgin Birth in three definite aspects.

1. *As regards form*, the whole narrative is simply a *deliberate recast* of the older Jewish fables about Samson and John.

2. *As regards matter*, on the other hand, it is to be explained as a *transformation* of biblical conceptions, *due to misconception*.

3. At the same time, those elements *drawn from heathen mythology* can be detected, which

<sup>1</sup> [Cp. Usener's article 'Nativity' in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 3351.]

<sup>2</sup> [The matter contained in the following eight paragraphs is based upon some quite recent investigations (see *Die Studierstube*, i. p. 56 f., 1903, Greiner and Pfeiffer, Stuttgart), and has kindly been supplied by the author.]

promoted the transformation of Christian ideas and the development of a wrong conception.

There can be no doubt in the mind of anyone who decides the question in a scientific way, that the story of the birth of John, Luke i. 5-25, 57-80, once formed a whole, and that its prototype was the history of the childhood of Samson found in Judges xiii. 1 f. As, in the case of Samson, the angel had foretold that 'the child shall be a person dedicated to God (a Nazirite unto God) from his mother's womb,' so the angel Gabriel prophesied of John the Baptist, 'he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.'

Now the episode of the Annunciation to Mary (Luke i. 26-56) is very similar in its wording to the story of the birth of John; we can only explain this by supposing that the former is dependent upon the latter (Luke i. 5-25, 57-80).<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 28-29 (the appearance of the angel Gabriel and the fear of Mary) is modelled on i. 11. Luke i. 13 served

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Soltau, *Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu Christi* in *Die Studierstube*, i. 58.

as a model for i. 30-31; i. 15 for i. 32a, 35; i. 16-17 for i. 32b-33; i. 18 for i. 34. So also in the case of the 'Benedictus,' this, in addition to 1 Sam. ii. 1-8, is the original pattern on which the 'Magnificat' of Mary was framed.

Thus, when a final attempt was made to give an account of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, Luke i. 34-35, the story about John served as the original pattern. Matthew i. 20-21 ('for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost'), again, can only be explained as dependent upon Luke i. 34.<sup>1</sup>

Yet not only in form but also as regards matter may the conception of a Virgin Birth be traced back to biblical ideas.

The teaching of Paul, like the Johannine view of Jesus, had introduced a peculiar *dualism* into the representation of Christ's person. Paul draws a distinction, as has been clearly pointed out, between the 'Christ according to the flesh, who was born of the seed of David,' and the same

<sup>1</sup> The first two chapters of Matthew were inserted at a very late date. Cp. Soltau, *Unsere Evangelien*, p. 75.

Christ 'who was a son of God according to the spirit which sanctifies, *since the time that* he arose from the dead, namely Jesus Christ, our Lord' (Romans i. 4).

Similarly the Johannine Gospel, also, has helped to spread a twofold view of Jesus' person. The Evangelist who sees in Jesus the son of Joseph, and yet at the same time the Son of God come from Heaven, the Logos made flesh, has in so doing given Christian people a pretext for not being content merely with the view that Jesus of Nazareth was son of a carpenter.

There can be no doubt whatever that the starting-point for the further development of myth in this domain is to be sought in these dualistic theories.

When the *Pauline and Johannine Christology*, *having been translated into popular language*, penetrated to the lower classes of the people, *it was almost bound to lead* to the view becoming current amongst Christians untrained in philosophy, that Christ, in calling God his Father, did not merely call Him so in the sense in which all are children of God, but that he was even



bodily of 'higher derivation, of divine origin.'

Here, then, the myth-making imagination of Christians, roused to religious enthusiasm, settled, and sought to remodel in a form intelligible to the senses, what had been puzzled out by the brains of philosophers and dogmatists; and in this task widely diffused heathen fables again came to their assistance.

**16. Heathen analogies for Virgin Birth.**—In more ancient times it was one of the chief ideas of Greek fable to trace back the origin of heroes, benefactors of the people, to the deity, even in a bodily sense. In very many instances Zeus was accounted to be the begetter of remarkable men; but the same assumption was made with regard to other gods also (Apollo, Mars, Mercury).

It is true that in later times these fables were ridiculed by enlightened persons amongst the ancients, and were not unfrequently treated by poets in an ironical and humorous way. Yet they lived on, notwithstanding, among the people, and made such a powerful impression that even in

the last century B.C. they could more than once be used as a means of investing historical personages with the nimbus of divine origin.

It is well known, for instance, what stress Alexander laid upon the fact that he was given out in the temple of Jupiter Ammon to be a son of Zeus. The honour secured him special authority in Egypt; it was the presupposition upon which the certainty of his rule over the minds of those who were subject to him rested. In order to make the idea still more palatable to the Greeks, he spread abroad amongst the Hellenic peoples the anecdote to the effect that he was not the bodily son of Philip, but was begotten of a serpent—the serpent cohabiting with his mother Olympias. The same story is told of Scipio Africanus (Gellius, *Noct. Att.*, 6). The serpent, especially among the Romans, was the symbol of the Genius, the protecting spirit of the family. The marriage-bed was sacred to the Genius of the family. When, in the case of such marriages as were for a long time unfruitful, a birth at length ensued, the happy event was

ascribed to this protecting spirit of the family.

Augustus also availed himself of this superstition on the part of the mass of the people, in order to get them to believe in his higher origin (cp. p. 77). On the one hand, he caused sacrifices to be offered everywhere to the Genius of the Emperor; on the other, he was careful that the fable should be widely diffused, to the effect that his mother Atia was once, while asleep in the temple of Apollo, visited by the god in the form of a serpent, and that in the tenth month afterwards he himself was born. Augustus also did everything else in his power to promote this belief that Apollo was his father. Soothsayer and poet, if they wished to win the favour of the Emperor, were obliged to treat the idea in their writings.

Was it to be wondered at, then, that kindred ideas grew up with regard to the origin of Christ, also, and that they found credence? This, at any rate, is clear: the belief in the Virgin Birth of Jesus could not have originated in Palestine; anyhow, it could never have taken its rise in Jewish circles.

The Spirit (*ruah*) of God is in Hebrew feminine. In the Gospel of the Hebrews Jesus calls the Holy Spirit his mother.<sup>1</sup>

To hold this view does not, of course, preclude us from supposing that the final redaction of the story of the birth in Luke i. 5 f. was derived from Jewish Christians. Hardly any other narrative in the New Testament recalls the Old Testament to us to the same extent as Luke i. 5 f. But the idea that the Holy Spirit begat Jesus can have no other than a Hellenic origin. Note here that the idea did not certainly arise until towards the end of the first century, or cannot have come to be commonly held. Even Luke ii. 1 f., as has been remarked, did not, we may be sure, yet consider this view to be sufficiently attested; for, otherwise, the Evangelist would not have thought fit to add certain supplementary corrections (as, for example, Luke ii. 21, iii. 23). Such a verse as ii. 50 would really have had no proper meaning if the narrative in Luke i. 5 f. had preceded it.

<sup>1</sup> [Cp. P. W. S. Schmiedel's article 'Mary' in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, col. 2963, § 16.]

It deserves to be noted that it was really only after the blissful tidings in Luke ii. 14 had been transferred from Augustus (cp. pp. 34 f. and 71, the inscription of Halicarnassus) to Jesus, that the further step also would seem to have been taken—and it could have been taken with relative ease—of applying the idea of the supernatural descent of Augustus to the case of Jesus. As the mother of Augustus was visited by the god of light and wisdom, so, it was supposed, would the new Prince of Peace naturally have owed his origin to the Spirit of all truth and wisdom.

**17. Conclusion as to narratives.**—After what has been said, we are justified in drawing the following conclusion. There was a tradition which transferred the birthplace of Jesus from Nazareth to the town of David, but in doing so allowed the fact that Joseph was the father to stand. In the earliest recast of this a few fabulous elements of *Hellenistic origin* were inserted towards the end of the first century A.D. All these insertions, which were three in number, referred what had been handed down and proclaimed in honour of the Roman

Emperor, especially of Augustus, to the true Saviour of the world. Thus, the announcement of blessing in the case of Augustus (cp. p. 68 f.) was made use of in Luke ii. 14; the supernatural birth of Augustus was in Luke i. 5 f., Matthew i. 19 f., transferred to Jesus; and, finally, the journey of the Magi with the intention of seeking out the new light of the world in the West became an ovation on the part of the wise men to the child Christ.

In view of all this, it must not be overlooked that the many quotations from the Old Testament, added by way of confirmation in Matthew i.--ii., the so-called reflex-citations (*Reflexionscitate*), which indicate another means of accounting, in part, for the origin of the history of the birth, cannot have formed the starting-point for the remarkable transformation of the legends of the childhood. It is clear, for instance, that Matthew i. 21 was conceived earlier than the thought expressed in i. 23. The latter, indeed, does

not really belong to i. 21 at all, for the name Immanuel does not bear the same meaning as the name Jesus. The former means 'God with us,' the latter signifies 'Deliverer.' Still less did the passage in the book of the prophet Hosea (xi. 1), 'Out of Egypt have I called my son,' actually suggest to anyone, before the Evangelist himself, the idea of drawing the conclusion that God wished in these words to point to Joseph's flight. And the Virgin Birth, in particular, was certainly not first inferred from the words of the prophet Isaiah in vii. 14; this passage was only adduced in order to give a reason for the remarkable popular fable regarding the Virgin Mary—an *additional* reason *drawn from the Bible*.<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew original there is no mention of a virgin, but the Septuagint translation gives *παρθένος* (= 'virgin'). Are we, then, to trace back the whole doctrine to a mistranslation in the Septuagint?

The quotations in Matthew i.-ii. did not, therefore, give rise to the fabrica-

<sup>1</sup> Cp. also P. Lobstein, *Die Lehre von der übernatürlichen Geburt Christi*, p 31.

tion of legends, but were introduced, as the result of literary art, for the purpose of supplementary and confirming mythical ideas which had long been supported by legends.

**18. Retrospect.**—Let us, in conclusion, gather together once more the most important reasons in favour of the rejection of this history of the childhood of Jesus which has been worked up from a heathen point of view. We are obliged to protest against the idea of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and to discard all the extravagant acts of veneration said to have been paid to the child Jesus, as being unhistorical.

(a.) *On Biblical Grounds.*—Neither Mark, who represents the account of Peter, nor John knows anything of it. The latter obviously in many places consciously takes up a cold attitude towards this popular distortion of a view advocated by himself—the view that the derivation of Jesus was supramundane. In short, no trace is to be detected in any passage in any of the Gospels, except in Matthew i. 16 f. and Luke i. 5 f.,

of the idea that Jesus was not the son of Joseph of Nazareth. Nor are Paul and the Acts of the Apostles otherwise informed; and though the majority of the biblical accounts make this Joseph a descendant of David, yet at one and the same time the home of Jesus is always regarded as being in Galilee. Even the second chapter of Luke assumed that Joseph of Nazareth was the father of Jesus, and the two genealogies given by the First and Third Evangelists have no proper meaning if they do not go back to Joseph as the father of Jesus. Finally, there are also convincing reasons to show that the history of the childhood in Matthew, as well as the first chapter of Luke, could only have been inserted into the Gospel at a later date.

Further, such views are to be rejected, (b.) *on other historical grounds*. For instance, evidence can be brought forward to show that all points in the accounts of the First and Third Evangelists which emphasise the divine origin of Jesus have been borrowed from heathen sources.

The song of the angels in Luke ii. 14

is framed in imitation of the encomiums published in edicts throughout Asia Minor in honour of Augustus. The homage of the Magi is a legendary feature which found its way into the sacred legend, on the strength of the act of homage once performed in honour of Nero—the homage offered to him by Tiridates and his Magi—and was here the more eagerly preserved, because people thought it supplied them with proof that the ministers of Mithras himself had made themselves subject to the true Saviour of the world. The travelling star which shone ahead of the wise men is in reality not to be discovered. It exists only in heathen legend; there, however, it appears regularly at the birth of great men or at their death. The star which shone at the time of the assassination of Cæsar was even in those days explained to be an indication of the future greatness of his heir Augustus. To take an early example, a planet was supposed to have shone in front of *Æneas*, showing him the way to take, and only disappearing when it reached Laurentum on the coast of Latium, for by so doing it showed this to be the place

where he was to lay the foundation of the world-dominion of later times.<sup>1</sup>

It would surely be something more than remarkable if the last non-Jewish idea in the story of the childhood, the Virgin Birth of Jesus, had not also been derived from *heathen fable*, which sought to trace the origin of great men to divine generation, and so to give an explanation of their supernatural characteristics.

Now, one and the same chapter in Suetonius (*Augustus*, 94)<sup>2</sup> gives, firstly, an account of the wonderful manifestations in the sky, which are supposed to have indicated that on the birth of Augustus the '*lord of the world*' had now been born; and secondly, the story of the *supernatural generation* of Augustus. At that time the current and popular way of explaining the origin of great benefactors of mankind, men apparently

<sup>1</sup> Varro in Servius on *Aen.* ii. 801. See Usener, *Untersuchungen*, p. 76 f. [Cp., in general, the same writer's article 'Nativity' in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, col. 3351.]

<sup>2</sup> He is supported by the accounts of contemporaries of Augustus (Julius Marathus, Cicero, Asclepiades). Cp. pp. 72-81.

endowed with divine gifts, was to suppose that a god had in each case held secret intercourse with the mother, that a Genius had visited her. So, in the case of Augustus, it was supposed to have been Apollo, the god of wisdom, who once sought his mother out in his temple. Similarly, in Christian circles people might soon come to think that the Messianic figure could only have arisen in a wonderful way. Jesus in a spiritual sense is called a Son of the Highest, the Christ who is now exalted to God ; the coming of one so described could not be explained now by thinking of the manger of Bethlehem. If the Messiah was everywhere correctly called the Son of God, it would very soon occur to the mind of the plain man to trace Him back bodily also to the Spirit of all wisdom. As the utterances of praise, poured forth in honour of Augustus, to announce in the market-places throughout Asia Minor his higher mission, were transferred from the earthly ruler of the world to the world's true Saviour, so presumably the legend of the generation of Augustus through the god of wisdom was also used to explain the deriva-

tion of Jesus from the Spirit of God, that is to say, wisdom itself.

To this we have still to add that (3) *objections must be raised even on purely religious grounds to all these accounts*, which would tell us of distinct marvels, appearing in Heaven and upon earth at the birth of Jesus, and especially to the story of his supernatural generation.

**19. General Conclusion.**—Jesus' conception of the nature of God rests quite frequently upon Old Testament representations. It is forcible like that of the prophets, fervent like that of the Psalms; like these it is poetical, and is pervaded by figurative ideas. In His representation of God, Jesus avoids all abstract and philosophical forms of expression, so that His conceptions may perhaps require to be to some extent supplemented in this direction. But through all the metaphorical and allegorical ways of conceiving His idea of God, there shines forth the purest representation of the Divine. The idea of a spirit embracing and guiding the whole world, seldom indeed reached again such a degree of purity, and was never again surpassed.

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‘God is a spirit, and those who worship him should worship him in spirit and in truth.’ Whoever does not highly esteem this highest maxim of all Christian faith, whoever cannot penetrate into the inmost nature of the Christian God, has no idea of the essence of Jesus’ teaching, and lacks the alphabet which might enable him both to decipher and to understand the language of Christ.

And are we to suppose that such a God could have lowered Himself, like the heathen gods, to the level of man and have exercised bodily functions? Either there exists in the realm of the sublime a spiritual being of the highest nature, such as Jesus revealed to us in his parables and in his beliefs; in that case, the idea of the Virgin Birth of Jesus is to be rejected. Or, on the other hand, the Virgin Birth was a reality; in that case, there is an end to such a belief regarding God as Jesus taught long ago. There is no third course. Whoever, in spite of what has been said, thinks that such fanciful ideas about a virgin mother of the gods can be held together

with those beliefs regarding God cherished by Jesus, can never yet have rightly perceived the manner in which, according to Jesus' view, a divine spirit influences the life of the individual.

We do not know at all how an influence on the part of God can take effect on the *fortunes* of the individual, and it will always be a matter of subjective feeling when we assume sometimes a less, sometimes a greater, measure of influence. But anyone who does not imagine unhealthy conceptions to be the suggestions of a Higher Power, must admit that his whole experience of a divine effect, both in his own case and in that of others, has been of quite a different spiritual nature from that which we must suppose to have happened in the case of a bodily generation through the Spirit of God. The Christian God, even the Old Testament God, stands so high above such petty human fancies, that one really cannot help wondering how the Christian Church can have so long contented itself with ideas of God such as contradict the Christian conception.

Anyone who seriously means by Christianity a Christianity such as the Gospels have revealed to us, who in particular has once formed an idea from these of the manner in which that God, of whose kingdom Jesus preached, makes Himself powerfully felt in the hearts of His worshippers, will be obliged to admit that this God is a different one from the god who by means of an angel mediator is supposed to have spoken with Mary, and to have held intercourse with her.

It is not in supernatural ecstasies, not with speeches of tongues or through sensual touch, that the Christian God works. Whoever does not hear His voice in his heart, whoever is still on the look-out always for mystic effects of a nature which can be but half grasped by the senses, or of a semi-supernatural and unnatural character, has no idea of the Ruler of that kingdom of God so unmistakably revealed to us by Jesus.

And if these religious considerations are not sufficient to convince people, because in the sphere of religion they consider anything, even the most peculiar event, to be possible (in accordance with the old maxim that in

religious matters it is precisely 'the inconceivable' that deserves special credit), let them cast a glance over the *history of the world*, and note in what way, by means of persons endowed with truly noble and divine-like characters, the rule of a Higher Power has made itself felt throughout it. However highly people may have been impressed by a childlike innocence, however spontaneously great talents would often seem to have arisen, a higher influence has never made itself felt immediately, and in such a way that the regular stages in a natural development have been dispensed with. In no case has a child been chosen to be the bearer of divine revelations. Certainly it is a true saying that out of the mouth of babes and orphans a higher wisdom has often been proclaimed. But an influence of the kind we are considering has never followed, unless the individual through his own further development has approached so near to the divine as to have given proof that he understood divine thoughts.

Are we, then, in the single case of the greatest religious genius, the son of the

carpenter of Nazareth, misunderstanding his true greatness, to try to explain away a like spiritual development, which taking its rise from small beginnings reached the complete fulness of divine life—a development lasting from the period of preparation in the wilderness to his death on the cross? Can we have so greatly misinterpreted his spiritual greatness as to find it possible to believe that his hours of weakness, of suffering, of struggle with the evil one and with the representatives of reaction, were only due to the divine light in him becoming at times dull?

No, it is in a conflict with lower, in a struggle with more imperfect, forms that all true spiritual greatness manifests itself; it is not a thing ready-made, but emerges, as it were, for the first time after a victorious struggle through commoner and less developed stages of an earlier period.

This has been the case, too, with all true heroes of Christendom. It was only after many mistakes and disappointments that out of the Galilean fishermen grew those fishers of men, who in the end attained that high

point in the consciousness of God and in the knowledge of salvation that made them capable of helping the word from the cross to triumph over the whole of the ancient world. It was only after many passionate struggles within the soul that out of Saul arose a Paul —a Paul who did more for Jesus 'than they all.' What would a Paul have been without his past? Even an Augustine would not have been the great Church writer that he was, without the struggles of his youth. Are we to suppose, then, that the Master alone, he who showed his true greatness chiefly in suffering, gained his divine height without those struggles in which the spiritual nature has first to shape and to test itself?

Now more than ever is there need that the Christian who would claim this name in truth, and who seriously understands Christianity to mean the knowledge of the real teaching of Jesus, should hold fast to those Sources which the results secured by the science of Theology offer to us as being the truly valuable Sources for the teaching of Jesus. In any other scientific investigation of a historical kind, an intelligent person would

think it unreasonable to regard those portions of a historical Source which have been built up by degrees as of equal value to others, solely because they are *now* published under a common title. Are we justified in the case of such important points of Christian belief in placing statements in the four Gospels on the same level, when they are demonstrably of very different value?

Surely the indiscretion of showing such credulousness as regards the fundamental teachings of the Creed, might be described as even criminal!

**20. Practical Conclusions.**—With this we may consider our investigation to be concluded. It only remains to draw in a few words the practical conclusions suggested by our theoretical inquiries. They are as follows :—

*An Evangelical Christian*, that is to say, a Christian holding fast in his religious convictions to the gospel of the Apostles, and of the Apostolic School, *is no longer able to believe in the supernatural origin of Jesus*. All records relating to it are without doubt borrowed from later fables, and these are to

be traced back in every case to heathen models.

If, in spite of this, it is not *possible to think* that an Evangelical Christian, as far as he himself is concerned, could give up altogether the views fondly cherished in earlier days, it is still the positive duty of *every Evangelical Christian* to make it his aim that *every kind of ecclesiastical obligation shall cease to be connected with the respective articles of the creed.*

*Whoever makes the further demand, that an Evangelical Christian shall believe in the words, 'Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,' wittingly constitutes himself sharer in a sin against the Holy Spirit of the true Gospel as transmitted to us by the Apostles and their school in the Apostolic Age.*

Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, became the God-given Messiah, not only of his own people, but also of the whole world. This is the true miracle. The science of History may indeed here and there throw light upon it; it can never fully elucidate it. Man will never be able to

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explain satisfactorily that secret means by which a higher spiritual power works upon the character and heart of mankind. And the miracle will certainly not be cleared up by bringing forward all kinds of superstitious ideas of heathen origin to account for it.

## APPENDIX

### AUTHORITIES.

#### I.

#### INSCRIPTIONS IN HONOUR OF AUGUSTUS.

Many fragments of the following inscriptions have been found in towns of Asia Minor, and the wording is similar. So, for instance, in Priene, Halicarnassus, Apameia, Eumeneia. Their contents are of two kinds:—

1. Some give decrees with respect to the introduction of the Asian calendar—that is to say, of a Julian solar year with somewhat slight modifications (so, for instance, the addition of an intercalary day to the last month).
2. Others deal with the instituting of the birthday of Augustus (23rd September) to be a general holiday (festival) and the first day of the year.

Compare, for particulars, Th. Mommsen and U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, 'Die Einführung des asianischen Kalenders,' in the *Mitteilungen des kaiserl. deutschen archäologischen Instituts*, Athenische Abteilung, vol. xxiv. p. 275 (1899). See also Harnack's remarks on this in the *Christliche Welt*, No. 51, 1899.

*From the Inscription from Priene.*

(With the help of the texts from Apameia  
and Eumeneia).

πότερον ἡδείων ἡ ὀφελιμωτέρα ἔστιν ἡ τοῦ θειοτάτου  
Καίσαρος γενέθλιος ἡμέρα, ἣν τῇ τῶν πάντων ἀρχῇ  
ἴσην δικαίως ἀν εἶναι ὑπολάβοιμεν . . . . εἴ γε οὐδεν  
οὐχὶ διαπεῖπτον καὶ εἰς ἀτυχὲς μεταβεβηκὸς σχῆμα  
ἀνώρθωσεν, ἐτέραν τε ἔδωκεν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ὅψιν,  
ἡδιστα ἀν δεξαμένῳ φθοράν, εἰ μὴ τὸ κοινὸν πάντων  
εὐτύχημα ἐπεγεννήθη Καίσαρ· διὸ ἀν τις δικαίως  
ὑπολάβοι τοῦτο αὐτῷ ἀρχὴν τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς ζωῆς  
γεγονέναι, ὃ ἔστιν πέρας καὶ ὅρος τοῦ μεταμέλεσθαι,  
ὅτι γεγέννηται. καὶ ἐπεὶ οὐδεμιᾶς ἀπὸ ἡμέρας εἰς  
τε τὸ κοινὸν καὶ εἰς τὸ ἴδιον ἔκαστος ὅφελος εὐτυ-  
χεστέρας λάβοι ἀφορμὰς ἡ τῆς πᾶσιν γενομένης  
εὐτυχοῦς, . . . .

ἐπειδὴ ἡ πάντα διατάξασα τοῦ βίου ἡμῶν πρόνοια  
σπουδὴν εἰσενεκαμένη καὶ φιλοτιμίαν τὸ τεληότατον  
τῷ βίῳ διεκόσμησεν ἐνεκαμένη τὸν Σεβαστόν, ὃν εἰς  
εὐεργεσίαν ἀνθρώπων ἐπλήρωσεν ἀρετῆς, ὥσπερ ἡμεῖν

*From the Inscription from Priene.*

## A.

[It is uncertain] whether the day on which the divine Cæsar was born was fairer and more profitable, the day which we justly rank equal to the beginning of things . . . . . set up again everything fallen, as it was, to complete ruin and come, as it had, into disastrous condition, and gave to the whole world a different appearance; it would verily have been destroyed, had not the general happiness of all, Cæsar (Augustus), been born. For this reason one might with right good cause see the beginning of the life of the individual, as well as of life in general, in that same being who was both the end and limit of all the sorrow because man was born. And since no one could make a more auspicious starting-point, either for the community or for his own advantage, with any other day than the day which was a piece of good fortune for all, [it is decreed that the 23rd Sept. be New Year's day.]

## B.

Now, when that *Providence* which guides all things in our life reawakened emulation and zeal, and conferred on our life the most perfect ornament by granting to us Augustus, and

καὶ τοῖς μεθ' ἡμᾶς σωτῆρα πέμψασα τὸν παύσοντα  
μὲν πόλεμον κοσμήσοντα δὲ πάντα, φανεῖς δὲ ὁ Καῖσαρ  
τὰς ἐλπίδας τῶν προλαβόντων. . . . .  
ἔθηκεν, οὐ μόνον τοὺς πρὸ αὐτοῦ γεγονότας εὐεργέτας  
ὑπερβαλόμενος, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἐσομένοις ἐλπίδα  
ὑπολιπῶν ὑπερβολῆς, ἥρξεν δὲ τῷ κόσμῳ τῶν δὲ  
αὐτὸν εὐαγγελίων ἡ γενέθλιος τοῦ θεοῦ, . . . .

(Luke ii. 10 ff. : καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς δὲ ἄγγελος Μή φοβεῖσθε· ἴδον γὰρ  
εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην, ἣτις ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, διὰ  
ἔτέχθη ὑμῖν σήμερον σωτήρ . . . . λεγόντων Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις,  
καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίᾳ.)

*Inscription from Halicarnassus.*

(*Op. cit.*, p. 293.)

ἐπεὶ ἡ αἰώνιος καὶ ἀθάνατος τοῦ παντὸς φύσις τὸ  
μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν πρὸς ὑπερβαλλούσας εὐεργεσίας  
ἀνθρώποις ἔχαριστο Καίσαρα τὸν Σεβαστὸν ἐνε-  
καμένη τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς εὐδαίμονι βίῳ, πατέρα μὲν τῆς  
έαυτοῦ πατρίδος θεᾶς Ρώμης, Δία δὲ πατρῷον καὶ

for the well-being of mankind (to men a good pleasure) filled him with virtue and sent him to us and to our offspring to be a *saviour* destined to make every war to cease and to set in order everything, Cæsar on his appearance fulfilled the hopes of those who pointed to him and at the same time not only excelled previous benefactors, but did not for a moment allow coming generations the hope of surpassing him, and the birthday of this *god* is become the beginning of *glad tidings* regarding him for the world . . . .; [for all these reasons should his birthday be celebrated among us.]

(Luke ii. 10 ff.: 'And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day . . . . a Saviour . . . . saying,

Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace,  
Among men of good pleasure.'

*Inscription from Halicarnassus.*

When the eternal and immortal Power which generated the world had added to all other abundant blessings the greatest good by granting to men, to our real good fortune, Cæsar Augustus, the father of his native town the divine Rome, the

σωτῆρα τοῦ κοινοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους, οὐ δὲ πρόνοια τὰς πάντων εὐχὰς οὐκ ἐπλήρωσε μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπερῆρεν. εἰρηνεύοντι μὲν γάρ γῆ καὶ θάλαττα, πόλεις δὲ ἀνθοῦσι, εὐνομίαι ὁμονοίαι τε καὶ εὐετηρίαι, ἀκμή τε καὶ φορὰ παντός ἔστιν ἀγαθοῦ, ἐλπίδων μὲν χρηστῶν πρὸς τὸ μέλλον, εὐθυμίας δὲ εἰς τὸ παρόν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐνεπεπλησμένων, ἀγῶσιν καὶ ἀγάλμασιν θυσίαις τε καὶ ὅμνοις. . . .

## II.

PLINY, *Historia naturalis*, xxx. 6.

Magus ad eum Tiridates venerat (Armeniacum de se triumphum adferens et ideo provinciis gravis. Navigare noluerat, quoniam expuere in maria aliisque mortaliū necessitatibus violare naturam eam fas non putant). Magos secum adduxerat, magicis etiam cenis eum initiaverat; non tamen cum regnum ei daret, hanc ab eo artem accipere valuit.

## III.

FROM DIO CASSIUS, xlivi. 1-2.

‘Ο Τηριδάτης . . . ξενγέσι πεμφθεῖσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ Νέρωνος ἐκομίσθη. . . . Καὶ ἐσ γῆν τὸ γόνυ καθεὶς, καὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἐπαλλάξας, δεσπότην τε αὐτὸν ὀνομάσας καὶ προσκυνήσας).<sup>1</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> Matthew ii. 11: (μάγοις ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν, ii. 1) πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ.

indigenous Jupiter, and at the same time the saviour of the whole human race, for the sake of which Providence, paying regard to the prayers of all, has not only fulfilled but also surpassed them ; for peace prevails on earth and sea ; the cities flourish ; law and harmony and peaceableness are found ; there is a fine abundance of all good things ; men are filled with the best hopes for the future, with joyful courage for the present : therefore should [the birthday of Augustus be celebrated] with games and contests, with sacrifices and songs.

## II.

PLINY, *Natural History*, xxx. 6.

Tiridates, the Magus, had come to him (Nero), . . . . He had brought Magi with him and had even initiated the emperor into the mysteries of the (Mithras-) meal, yet, although he might give him a kingdom (in Armenia), he (Nero) was not able to take over this art from him.

## III.

FROM DIO CASSIUS, xlivi. 1-2.

Tiridates . . . . was driven in the chariot which Nero had sent to him. . . . . And bending his knee to the earth and lifting his hands, he called him his lord and worshipped him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew ii. 11 : '(Magi from the East, ii. 1) fell down and worshipped him.'

## IV.

FROM DIO CASSIUS, xliii. 5.

εἶπε γὰρ οὕτως· ἐγώ, δέσποτα, Ἀρσάκου μὲν ἔκγονος, Οὐολογάίσου δὲ καὶ Πακόρου τῶν Βασιλέων ἄδελφος, σὸς δὲ δοῦλός εἰμι. καὶ ἥλθον τε πρὸς σὲ τὸν ἐμὸν θεὸν, προσκυνήσων σε, ὡς καὶ τὸν Μίθραν.

## V.

FROM DIO CASSIUS, xliii. 7.

Ἄνεκομίσθη δὲ (ό Τηριδάτης) οὐχ ὑπερ ἥλθε διὰ τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ . . . . καὶ εἰδε καὶ τὰς ἐν Ἀσίᾳ πόλεις.

(Matthew ii. 12: δι' ἀλλης δδοῦ ἀνεχώρησαν εἰς τὴν χάραν αὐτῶν.)

## VI.

SUETONIUS, *Augustus*, 94

Et quoniam ad hoc ventum est, non ab re fuerit, subtexere, quae ei, prius quam nasceretur, et ipso natali die ac deinceps evenerint, quibus futura magnitudo eius et perpetua felicitas sperari animadverteque posset. Velitris antiquitus tacta de coelo parte muri responsum est, eius oppidi civem quandoque rerum potiturum: qua fiducia Veliterni

## IV.

## FROM DIO CASSIUS, xlivi. 5.

For he spake thus:—I, my Lord, a scion of Arsaces, the brother of kings Vologæsus and Pacorus, am thy slave. And I am come to thee as to my God, worshipping thee, even as (the sun-god) Mithras.

## V.

## FROM DIO CASSIUS, xlvi. 7.

But Tiridates did not travel back by the way he had come, through Illyria . . . . and he visited also the cities of Asia.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (Matthew ii. 12: 'they departed into their own country another way.')

## VI.

SUETONIUS, *Life of Augustus*, ch. 94.

And since I have once come to speak of these things, it will not be unfitting to add here those portents which before, during, and after his birth indicated clearly his future greatness and uninterrupted good fortune. When of old the lightning struck a portion of the wall in his native town Velitrae, a prophecy was connected with it

et tunc statim et postea saepius paene ad exitium sui cum populo Romano belligeraverant. Sero tandem documentis apparuit, ostentum illud Augusti potentiam portendisse. Auctor est Julius Marathus, ante paucos, quam nasceretur, menses prodigium Romae factum publice, quo denunciabatur, regem populi Romani naturam parturire: Senatum exterritum censuisse, ne quis illo anno genitus educaretur: eos, qui gravidas uxores haberent, quod ad se quisque spem traheret, curasse, ne senatusconsultum ad aerarium deferretur.

In Asclepiadis Mendetis Θεολογουμένων libris lego, Atiam, cum ad solemne Apollinis sacrum media nocte venisset, posita in templo lectica, dum ceterae matronae dormirent, obdormisse; draconem repente irrepisse ad eam, pauloque post egressum; illamque expergefactam, quasi a concubitu mariti purificasse se, et statim in corpore eius extitisse maculam, veluti depicti draconis, nec potuisse umquam exigi; adeo ut mox publicis balneis perpetuo abstinuerit; Augustum natum mense decimo, et ob hoc Apollinis filium existimatum. Eadem Atia, priusquam pareret, somniavit, intestina sua ferri ad sidera, explicarique per omnem

to the effect that a citizen of that town would one day attain the highest power ; the Veliterni, relying upon this interpretation, forthwith and several times afterwards made war with the Romans to the risk of their own existence.

But at a later date the facts supplied clear proof that this omen pointed to the might of Augustus. Julius Marathus tells us that a few months before the birth of Augustus a prodigy occurred in a public place at Rome, whereby the announcement was made that Nature was to present the Roman people with a king, whereupon the senate, being alarmed, decided that no child born in this year might be brought up ; but those whose wives were with child, since each one of them applied the hope to his own case, took care that the senate's decision should not acquire the force of law.

In the 'theological books' of Asclepiades of Mendes, written in Greek, I read as follows :—Atia betook herself at midnight to a solemn service in honour of Apollo, and there in her couch in the temple, whilst the other women were at rest, fell into a little sleep. Then suddenly a serpent glided up to her, and soon afterwards went away again ; she herself on awakening, feeling as though her husband had held intercourse with her, purified herself therefrom, and forthwith a mark which took the form of a great serpent showed itself on her body, and was not to be effaced, so that she thenceforth refrained from bathing in the

terrarum et coeli ambitum. Somniavit et pater Octavius, utero Atiae iubar solis exortum.

Quo natus est die, cum de Catilinae coniuratione ageretur in curia, et Octavius ob uxoris puerperium serius adfuisset, nota ac vulgata res est P. Nigidium, comperta morae caussa, ut horam quoque partus acceperit, affirmasse, dominum terrarum orbi natum. Octavio postea, cum per secreta Thraciae exercitum duceret, in Liberi patris luco barbara ceremonia de filio consulenti, idem affirmatum est a sacerdotibus: quod, infuso super altaria mero, tantum flammae emicuisse, ut supergressa fastigium templi ad coelum usque ferretur, unique olim omnino Magno Alexandro apud easdem aras sacrificanti simile provenisset ostentum. Atque etiam sequenti nocte statim videre visus est filium mortali specie ampliorem cum fulmine et sceptro exuviisque Jovis Optimi Maximi ac radiata corona, super laureatum currum bis senis equis candore eximio trahentibus.

public baths. In the tenth month afterwards she gave birth to Augustus, and he was accordingly held to be a son of Apollo. The same Atia dreamed before her delivery that her bowels were carried up to the sky, and were there spread over the whole expanse of heaven and earth. The father of Augustus, too, Octavius, dreamed that the bright light of the rising sun emerged from the womb of Atia.

On the day of his birth, when the conspiracy of Catiline was being dealt with in the Senate, and Octavius, on account of his wife's delivery, had come rather late to the sitting, it is a well-known fact that Nigidius Figulus, on hearing the cause of the delay, and at the same time the hour of birth, declared that in this hour *a lord* was presented to *the earthly sphere*. Octavius received a like assurance from the priests, when, at a later date, as he led his army through the deserts of Thrace, he consulted the Thracian oracle in a grove of father Bacchus concerning his son. For, when they poured out the wine on the altar, a flame burst forth, leaping out over the temple roof and up to the sky — a mighty portent, the like of which, as the priests said, was given besides only to Alexander the Great when he sacrificed at the same altars. On the following night, too, he seemed to see his son, of supernatural size, with thunder and sceptre, and attired in the gorgeous robes of Olympian Jupiter and with a crown of sunbeams,

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M. Cicero, C. Caesarem in Capitolium prosecutus, somnium pristinae noctis familiaribus forte narrabat: puerum facie liberali demissum coelo catena aurea ad fores Capitolii constitisse, eique Jovem flagellum tradidisse: deinde, repente Augusto viso, quem ignotum adhuc plerisque avunculus Caesar ad sacrificandum acciverat, affirmavit, ipsum esse, cuius imago secundum quietem sibi obversata sit. Sumenti virilem togam, tunica lati clavi resuta ex utraque parte ad pedes decidit. Fuerunt, qui interpretarentur, non aliud significare, quam ut is ordo, cuius insigne id esset, quandoque ei subiceretur.

In secessu Apolloniae, Theogenis mathematici pergulam, comite Agrippa, ascenderat: cum Agrippae, qui prior consulebat, magna et paene incredibilia praedicerentur, reticere ipse genituram suam, nec velle edere, perseverabat, metu ac pudore, ne minor inveniretur. Qua tamen post multas hortationes vix et cunctanter edita exsiluit Theogenes adoravitque eum. Tantam mox fiduciam fati Augustus habuit, ut thema suum vulga-

sitting on high in a laurel-bedecked chariot drawn by six pairs of pure-white horses.

Marcus Cicero, when one day he accompanied Julius Cæsar to the Capitol, casually narrated to some friend a dream he had dreamed on the previous night. He dreamed that a handsome boy was let down from the sky by a golden chain, and stood at the gates of the Capitol, where Jupiter handed him a scourge. As he told the story, he suddenly looked at Augustus, who was still unknown to him, as he was to most of those present, and whom Cæsar had sent for to the sacrificial solemnities, and declared that this was the same boy as he appeared to him during his sleep. When Augustus, having attained to manhood, put on the toga for the first time, the clasps on both sides of the broad-striped tunic becoming loose, it fell down at his feet. This was interpreted by some to be a sign that the Order denoted by this piece of clothing would one day come under his control.

During his stay in Apollonia, he had once, in company with Agrippa, gone up to the observatory of the astrologer Theogenes. Here, when great and almost incredible things were prophesied to Agrippa, he being the first to consult the astrologer, Augustus remained obstinately silent as to the hour of his birth, and refused to give the constellation for fear and shame that it might prove to be of minor significance. No sooner, however, had he reluctantly

verit, numumque argenteum nota sideris Capricorni,  
quo natus est, percusserit.

Post necem Caesaris, reverso ab Apollonia et  
ingrediente eo urbem, repente liquido ac puro  
sereno, circulus ad speciem coelestis arcus, orbem  
solis ambiit, ac subinde Juliae, Caesaris filiae, monu-  
mentum fulmine ictum est.

given both, having at length been induced by urgent requests to do so, than Theogenes sprang up and worshipped him.

Soon after Augustus put such great confidence in his star, that he publicly made known the sign under which he had been born, and had a silver coin struck with the representation of Capricorn, under which he was born.

When, after the assassination of Cæsar, on his return from Apollonia, he entered into the city, there was suddenly displayed in a clear and bright sky a circular ring like a rainbow encircling the sun's disk, and immediately afterwards the funeral monument of Cæsar's daughter, Julia, was struck by lightning.



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